AVIATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

FAA Could Improve How It Develops Its Portfolio and Reports Its Activities

Why GAO Did This Study
The federal government conducts aviation R&D to advance U.S. technological leadership, foster a dynamic aerospace industry, and improve the safety of the civil aviation system. GAO was asked to review FAA’s management of its R&D portfolio, including the extent to which FAA’s R&D is structured and operated to achieve its mission. This report addresses (1) the extent to which FAA’s management of its R&D portfolio follows requirements, guidance and leading practices, (2) the extent to which FAA and NASA coordinate on their R&D activities, and (3) how FAA cooperates with the private sector on R&D.

What GAO Found
The Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) actions are not fully consistent with requirements, agency guidance, and leading practices related to the management of its research and development (R&D) portfolio. GAO assessed FAA’s actions to manage its R&D portfolio in three key areas: (1) developing its portfolio of R&D projects, (2) tracking and evaluating these projects, and (3) reporting on the portfolio. We found that FAA could be more strategic in how it develops its R&D portfolio, chiefly in identifying long-term research needs and in improving disclosure of how projects are selected. As a result, FAA management cannot be assured that the highest priority R&D is conducted. GAO also found that while FAA tracks and evaluates its research projects consistent with leading practices, it does not fully address all statutory reporting requirements, such as identifying long-term research resources in the National Aviation Research Plan (NARP) or preparing the R&D Annual Review in accordance with government performance-reporting requirements. These reporting deficiencies can limit the usefulness of the reports to internal and outside stakeholders. FAA has begun to examine how it can improve the usefulness and timeliness of its R&D reports, but has not identified specific changes needed.

What GAO Recommends
GAO recommends that the Secretary of the DOT require the FAA Administrator to: (1) identify long-term R&D research priorities, (2) disclose how projects are selected, and (3) ensure that the NARP and R&D Annual Reviews meet statutory requirements for content. DOT concurred with the recommendations.